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James, Edmund Janes

The great educational  
need of Philadelphia

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THE  
GREAT EDUCATIONAL NEED  
OF PHILADELPHIA.

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THE GREAT EDUCATIONAL NEED  
OF PHILADELPHIA.

BY

E. J. JAMES.

ONE of the most notable events of the last few years in the life of Philadelphia has been the growing public interest in school matters. This interest has showed itself in a concrete form and has resulted in certain definite improvements on which we may congratulate the community. Prominent, if not chief among them, is the establishment on a firm basis of the principle of supervision. The Board of Education showed itself in earnest by searching the whole country through and finding the very best man for the position of Superintendent. The choice has vindicated its wisdom in more ways than one, not the least of them being the greater spirit of earnest professional work which Mr. MacAlister has succeeded in instilling into the body of teachers.

The work of the Sub-Primary Society and of the Public Education Association, etc., have also given indubitable evidence of an increasing interest in public school matters; while the many city kindergartens, the new Manual Training School, the introduction of instruction in manual training into several grammar schools, the adoption of instruction in sewing and cooking as a part of the regular curriculum, all mark steps forward of which any city may be proud and on which we may surely congratulate ourselves.

The work, however, is not by any means done yet. There remain many steps to be taken before the system will be one worthy in every way of the city. Prominent among these needs is an opportunity to make a thorough study of the science of education in its broadest aspects. It is a mere common place that the character of the schools depends in the long run on the character of the teachers. If the teachers are well educated, experienced, talented, not merely ready to accept, but eager to search out and discover improvements, the schools will be good.

Now while Philadelphia has excellent schools where its physicians can not only get a fine theoretical education but also an efficient practical training under the direction of experienced professors; while it has a good law school where those looking forward to the practice of legal profession can be in-

troduced into the mysteries of the law by the very best legal talent of Philadelphia; while there are several schools where its clergymen may get the peculiar training proper for their work, there is no place where its teachers, surely quite as important a class, can get any corresponding training. We may be pointed, of course, to the city Normal School as giving what is desired. It must be borne in mind, however, that three-fourths of the course is given up to the pursuit of the usual studies of an ordinary high school course and, at the very most, one year to the so-called professional work. This is entirely inadequate. How absurd it would seem to call that a medical school in which the first two years were given to studying reading, writing and arithmetic and the last year only to a hurried rush through the whole field of medicine, theoretical and practical, and the candidate turned loose on the community to practice upon our bodies as a doctor of medicine. The city itself, moreover, shows how much importance it sets upon this normal training by giving exactly the same certificate to all graduates of the city high school who attain a certain average standing, although they know no more of teaching than they do of theology or law or medicine.

Is teaching any easier than practicing medicine or law? or are the minds or characters of our children less important than

their bodies or our purses? that we should not entrust either of the latter to the tyro while we are perfectly willing to place the former in his hands.

It may, however, be said that it is impossible to get enough properly qualified teachers to do the work and so we must take what we can get. That is perhaps true, but it is surely to be regretted that it is so and we should all the more put forth every effort in our power to increase the number of high grade teachers, so as at least to secure as high an average as possible. Now there are surely some in this great number of teachers who would like to learn their business thoroughly, some who have or would get the means and would take the time to properly prepare themselves for the great work before them. Now where can they find the facilities? where can they get courses in the history of the theories and methods of education? where can they get instruction in the body of doctrine or of empirical rules which have shaped education in different countries and at different times? where will they find adequate courses in the philosophy of mind and character with special reference to their application to the problem of daily work in the school room?

To our grief, be it said, that they can find it nowhere in Philadelphia and only in its elements this side of the Mississippi Valley or of the Atlantic Ocean. In other words, if a Philadelphia boy or girl determines to fit himself or herself to be a teacher in a thorough-

ly efficient manner, he or she must go to Germany or to Michigan or Wisconsin to do it. That means, of course, he or she does not go, and instead of a first class teacher in our schools that might be a power in the community, we get a routinist interested at most in the narrowest aspect of his work, or if desiring something better, not being able to get any assistance in his efforts.

Would it not be a worthy object to provide for the wants of this class? Could the friends of public education do anything more conducive to its ends than to set on foot a movement which would result in this very thing? What has stood in the way of reform in school matters all over the world? Poor teachers. What will hasten reform? Good teachers. Manual training, cooking, sewing and countless other things will come of themselves if we secure a good strong leaven working in the community.

How eagerly such facilities would be utilized by our teachers and those intending to become teachers may be inferred from the warm reception given to the excellent course of lectures on education given by the Superintendent on Saturdays. Scores of teachers, over worked, under paid, little appreciated, turn aside from their work and employ the only day and about the only time they have free from the grinding labor of the week to learn something more of the science and art of their profession. The many little pedagogical clubs started all over the city give evidence of the same thing. There is a

saving remnant and we can in no way further the progress of education more efficiently than by upholding the hands of this remnant, by putting at their disposal and the like of them the very best facilities for learning all about their work.

Now how can this be done? In the same way that other countries and other localities of our own country have adopted. By establishing a professorship in the science and art of education whose incumbent should have the duty of bringing home to the doors of Philadelphia boys and girls an opportunity to fit themselves for the very highest and best work in education. It should be in combination with other professorships, such as the history and theory of psychology, experimental psychology, social science, general history, etc., i. e. in the University. A professor of pedagogy in the university could avail himself of the courses in allied subjects already offered there, and in this field there are no better facilities in this country and few as good abroad, and thus organize a course which would exactly fit the wants of the class I have mentioned.

Not only would such a course benefit Philadelphia in the manner I have indicated but also by attracting numbers of young people from other places in search of the facilities here offered. We would make Philadelphia the pedagogical centre of the Middle States as it is the geographical center. Many of the best persons who came here to study would remain permanently and we should

thus have a larger number of qualified persons from whom to select our teachers. We should have the credit of making another advance in education by being the first city to provide adequate facilities for the best education in this field.

Is not this a worthy cause? Can the friends of public education in general think of any plan by which the general level of teaching efficiency may be more surely raised than that of securing for this work a place and abiding home in our great Universities, where so many other callings have been raised from the level of trades to that of dignified professions by instilling in their followers the truly professional spirit based on extensive special scholarship. Can the Sub-Primary do a better thing for the purpose it has at heart than to help the teachers of Philadelphia improve themselves? Can the Public Education Association find a more worthy object or one which, if accomplished, will do more to realize all the other aims of that society than this? Can any public spirited citizen of Philadelphia find a cause in which the same amount of money will bring more good to the community in more different ways than this? Can the charitably inclined find a plan more worthy of support than one which aims to bring to the over-worked and under-paid girl who is sacrificing her life in the public schools, the advantages and helps, the inspiration and aid which her circumstances forbid her seeking elsewhere.

So evident to any one who reflects upon it are the advantages that would accrue to the community from such a step that a number of the students at the University have been moved to undertake the raising of a guarantee fund for the establishment of a professorship in pedagogy, believing that it needs but to be tried in order to demonstrate its utility or rather necessity. Individual members of the Board of Trustees show their interest in it by starting the list with handsome subscriptions. It is to be hoped that every other friend of public education will show a similar interest in the work either by contributing himself or by persuading others to contribute or both.

Certainly no equal expenditure of money can do more for education than this—none more benefit to the teachers, better bring work in the schools, more stimulus to all good educational causes, more credit to Philadelphia, more satisfaction to all concerned in its accomplishment.

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<sup>#</sup>Compare a further argument in

1. *Chairs of Pedagogics in our Universities.* By E. J. James, publication of Social Science Association, Philadelphia.
2. *Plan of a school of Pedagogy.* By James MacAllister, Public Ledger, 1889.

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